

VZCZCXYZ0006  
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHUL #2574/01 2391029  
ZNY SSSSS ZZH  
O 271029Z AUG 07  
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6233  
INFO RUEHAD/AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI PRIORITY 0110  
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA PRIORITY 0206  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 0597  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0092  
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 0145  
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/COMUSFK SEOUL KOR PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA J2 SEOUL KOR PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA J5 SEOUL KOR PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA SCJS SEOUL KOR PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC//OSD/ISA/EAP// PRIORITY  
RUEHBUL/USDAO KABUL AF PRIORITY

S E C R E T SEOUL 002574

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/26/2017  
TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [KS](#) [AF](#)  
SUBJECT: ROK OPTIMISTIC TALIBAN WILL RELEASE KOREAN  
HOSTAGES BY END OF AUGUST

Classified By: AMB. ALEXANDER VERSHBOW. REASONS 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (S) The Ambassador was called in to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFAT) late in the day on August 27 to receive an upbeat report on the status of the Korean hostage negotiations in Afghanistan. Deputy Minister for Political Affairs Shim Yoon-joe, who was serving as acting foreign minister while Song Min-soon is away on travel to the Middle East, informed the Ambassador that the ROK negotiating team in Afghanistan, led by National Intelligence Service chief Kim Man-bok, had held three productive face-to-face meetings with the Taliban in recent days. When the fourth meeting takes place we will be very close to achieving a final settlement, Shim said, that will likely include the release of all or most of the remaining 19 Korean hostages. He added that the fourth meeting had been scheduled to take place earlier in the day, but that it had been delayed for technical reasons for perhaps a couple of days.

¶2. (S) Shim went on to say that when the hostages are released the ROK would like U.S. military assistance to transport the 5 men and 14 women, plus an undetermined number of ROK officials who will accompany them, from the Ghazni PRT to Bagram Airbase. The ROK army medical unit that operates the hospital at Bagram will then check the health of the hostages. After that, the ROK will most likely ask that a U.S. C-130, or other appropriate aircraft, be made available to fly the hostages directly back to Korea. Shim said he had given the hostage families a fairly optimistic assessment of the situation, but that the ROK government was well aware that problems could still arise. The Taliban are very unpredictable, he said. As the discussion continued, he acknowledged that the hostage release may occur in steps, and that perhaps only some would be released initially. For that reason, and given the continued sensitivity of the yet to be completed negotiations, Shim asked that this information be handled as discreetly as possible by U.S. authorities.

¶3. (S) Asked by the Ambassador to point to the factors the ROK felt had contributed the most to this promising new development, Shim listed the following:

-- Public opinion in the world that had been critical of the Taliban for kidnapping women.

-- The approach of Ramadan beginning on September 12th.

-- And Foreign Minister Song Min-soon's meeting with King Abdullah in Saudi Arabia on August 26.

According to Shim, King Abdullah had phoned President Karzai after the meeting and Karzai had told him he would do his utmost to resolve the situation favorably. Shim added that the ROK had also sent some local Muslim leaders to Pakistan to ask for the assistance of their religious counterparts. He went on to explain that FM Song would travel to the United Arab Emirates on August 28, and to Qatar on August 29, in his continuing effort to gain the help of other Islamic friends. He said Song had decided to go to Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar because all three countries had once had diplomatic relations with the Taliban government.

14. (S) Noting that DM Shim sounded very encouraged, the Ambassador said he was encouraged too, but that the U.S. Government would continue to do all it could until the hostages were returned safely to their families. The Ambassador did not promise any particular assistance and pointed out that any transport the U.S. might provide would depend on the availability of appropriate assets at that place and time. He told DM Shim, however, that he would give U.S. diplomatic and military authorities a heads up on the pending ROK request for military transport and that we shared the Korean government's hope that the hostages would soon be coming home.

15. (S) Sounding apologetic, and explaining that what followed was his own personal view, DM Shim pointed out that aside from one prior killing of a Korean citizen by Iraqi insurgents, this was the first time that the ROK had had to endure a major hostage crisis. He opined that as Korea continues to play a growing role in the world, the Korean people would perhaps become more comfortable with the sacrifices that may entail, but that they were currently unwilling to accept the premise that their government should accept the sacrifice of some of its citizens for the sake of larger principles. He felt, however, that it would be better if the ROK did continue to mature to the point where it had the capacity to take a more principled stand.

VERSHBOW